

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

IMPROVING THE INDONESIAN INTERAGENCY RESPONSE TO CRISES

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ABSTRACT

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This Strategy Research Project (SRP) equivalent focuses on the recent experience in Indonesia as a result of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami that made apparent the lack of quick response by the Indonesian government to crisis. The current system is deliberate and bureaucratic. Hence, it is too slow to respond to national emergencies. This paper will analyze the cause of this problem and recommend governmental changes; an interagency structure designed to more rapidly respond to future crises in Indonesia.

IMPROVING THE INDONESIAN INTERAGENCY RESPONSE TO CRISES

Introduction

The earthquake and the wave of tsunami disaster that struck the Aceh and the North Sumatra province on December 26, 2004 was a very extra ordinary incident. The tsunami wave crashed into the Indonesian shore and destroyed everything in its path. All the cities along the Aceh coast and the Nias island in North Sumatra were destroyed.

Indonesia was not the only country affected. The earthquake and the tsunami also destroyed the other countries in the region--significant parts of Thailand, Malaysia, India and Sri Lanka. The earthquake, registering a force of 8.7 on the Richter scale had its epicenter near Meulaboh, a small town on the Indonesian coast. The tsunami hit Indonesia and severely damaged the Aceh and the North Sumatra Island of Nias. These areas suffered 200,000 casualties¹. The material loss was staggering and made quantifying the total loss difficult.

The Indonesian people expected the Indonesian central government response to quickly recover from the disaster. However, this high expectation soon proved to be a dream for the Acehinese and North Sumatra community. They saw no government action. Instead, all they saw was the destruction of their homes and livelihood and the corpses of their relatives spread far and wide. This tragic condition continued up to a month after the earthquake and tsunami hit.

The condition for the disaster area, especially in Aceh, became more complicated to resolve. Aceh was one of the disputed areas. Separatists fighting for independence from Indonesia controlled the area. The separatists posed a threat to the any foreigner providing aid. The controversy over whether to accept the risk delayed the central government's decision to accept foreign aid in the Ache province. The delay contributed to the greater loss of life when aid could not reach the severely injured in time. Had the decision been made sooner perhaps more lives could have been saved.

Had the Indonesian government formed an Ad Hoc, interagency organization to prepare plans for eventual disasters; implemented an Early Warning System (EWS) capable of detecting the earthquake and tsunami; directed training in disaster response; and managed the response effort, the extent of the damage and lives lost may have been avoided or, at a minimum, reduced considerably.

Current Condition

The Republic of Indonesia's government is led by the President who is assisted by a Vice President a cabinet. The cabinet consists of three Coordinator Ministers (Coordinator Minister

of Politics, Law and Human Rights; Coordinator Minister for the Economy; and Coordinator Minister for People Welfare); 18 Department Ministers; 12 State Ministers; and 3 Special Ministers who work directly for the President. Further, the government's disaster response was based on presidential decisions 3/2001 and 111/2001 which directed that the National level response was formed by a National Coordination Body, for the disaster control and refugee relief. The Vice President leads the coordination body. Similar organizations exist at provincial and local level. The Governor leads the provincial coordination body while the Regents or Mayors lead the local Regency or City coordination bodies.

This bureaucratic organization² was suspected of being one of the key sources responsible for the lack of response to the disaster in Aceh and North Sumatra. Generally, the governor's tasks, as well as those of the Regent/Mayor down to the village level, are numerous and difficult. Therefore, they may not have received the necessary attention to enhance preparedness for possible natural disasters. As a result, when disaster struck all the available elements were not ready to face it. The government's sluggishness, therefore, is likely a result of a bureaucratic culture in Indonesia. Consequently, people involved in providing aid were reactive and waited for requests and directives that never came down to those who could assist the victims. Further, there was little redundancy or hardening of key facilities. The scope and power of the tsunami destroyed the infrastructure in Aceh and North Sumatra taking with it the telecommunication system necessary to request and coordinate aid. The result was a delay in critical aid—determining where and how much was needed. Consequently, many perished between the end of the disaster and the time when aid finally arrived. Additionally, the government's poor preparation in dealing with natural disasters of this extent also contributed to the delay. Because of the poor training and preparedness government personnel responded passively. They were paralyzed and felt powerless to respond to the overwhelming loss of life and need for assistance. Locally, many responded to provide necessary aid but efficiency and effectiveness of their efforts failed to make much of a difference in the relief effort because they were poorly coordinated and supported.

Further, responsiveness suffered due to the lack of clarity of the problem and the centralized control of funding necessary to help people most affected. The resultant confusion meant government officials did not understand who was responsible for funding and responding at each level. The result was confusion that also contributed to the delayed response.

The Indonesian National Defense Force (TNI) and the Indonesian National Police (Polri) were the two organizations most ready to respond and provide assistance. Although they were eager to respond, further delays occurred because of a U.S. embargo placed on spare parts.

Particularly affected were aircraft. Of the 20 C-130 aircraft available, only four were operational and ready to assist. The remaining 16 were inoperable due to the lack of spare parts.

Foreign aid came in great quantities but had to be controlled and directed by the Indonesian government. Because the tsunami hit and destroyed areas controlled by the separatists, particularly in the Aceh area, timely aid delivery was further complicated.

The government's response was coordinated by assigning the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Defense to both assist in facilitating the delivery of foreign aid. International agreement with these arrangements enhanced the flow of aid, especially in food and medicine. U.S. supporting the form of ship-based helicopter support (provided by the USS. Abraham Lincoln) and ship-borne medical assistance (on board the USNS Mercy) greatly helped in distributing aid, evacuating casualties, and providing critical medical treatment to the victims.

The Influential Factors

- The width of the Indonesian archipelago with many islands and with the difference culture and language available became one of the difficulties in providing help when the disaster happened.
- The Indonesian economic situation one not yet stable, contributed to the lack of emerging prepared reflected in their meager budgets.

Future Condition That Was Hoped For

- Had an Ad hoc, interagency organization designed for the control and management of disaster response been established, the Indonesian government could accelerate the government's response at all levels and, in the long term, prepare a permanent organization that at once could act responsively when disasters strike.
- Procurement of an Early Warning System equipment to detect earthquake and tsunami activity in the coastal area.
- Robust and redundant telecommunication and transportation assets to support process giving of help to casualties in the disaster area.
- Creating education and training programs for the communities potentially facing disasters, especially those vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis. However, knowledge about other forms of disaster would also enhance response effectiveness in the face of future disasters.

Efforts That Should Be Carried Out

To create an effective organization to overcome future disasters with well-coordinated and available skilled personnel from organizations already formed, the president should form new Ad Hoc, interagency organizations to accelerate the government's response in the implementation of disaster control to reduce casualties and suffering in disaster areas. The Ad hoc organization should include membership of personnel with knowledge in management and disaster control. These organizations should be supported by government agencies also involved with disaster control. For example, establishing ad hoc agencies that include the Department of Defense (for the mobilization of the TNI personnel) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (for the mobilization of personnel to coordinate IO, NGO, and other organizations from the International Community) would improve response to disasters and enhance effectiveness. Ad Hoc organizations could leverage organizations that already exist in the province supplemented by their established local networks to the village level that would add the personnel and equipment needed to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of disaster response measures.

Procure communication, transportation, and early warning system equipment to face earthquake and tsunami disasters. Give priority to the provinces with shorelines most vulnerable to consequences from earthquakes and tsunamis to create an adequate and rational funding plan.

Education and training for disaster response for the communities should be continuous. Priority should be given to the communities that live in the shoreline in the area with the highest potential of danger from earthquakes and tsunamis. Results of education and training should be expected to supply communities facing these dangers with a capability to better respond to future disasters and reduce the possibility of a high toll in casualties and significant material/financial losses in the communities protected and trained.

Conclusion

The earthquake and tsunami disaster on 26 December 2004 in Aceh and North Sumatra province was the worst disaster in Indonesian history. Deaths attributed to this natural disaster exceeded 200,000 people.

- The organization of the available disaster control could not react quickly because of the form and characteristics of its bureaucratic structure and procedures.

- Readiness of the disaster control organization was poor. Supporting equipment existed in limited quantities because of poor planning and an insufficient allocation of funds.
- The shortage of experienced personnel in responding to a disaster this extensive resulted in the vast number of casualties.
- 1The strict bureaucratic rules, especially during implementation delayed international aid whose response was too late to save many lives.

Recommendation

To speed up the implementation of the disaster control activity, the following is recommended:

- The need to immediately form an Ad Hoc organization, supervised by the president, whose membership has expert knowledge regarding disaster control. The organization's leader should be chosen directly by the president. The leader must have credibility as well the dedication and leadership to make the organization responsive and effective. Further, in the long term, the government should immediately man, train, and equip a permanent organization that contribute to this Ad Hoc structure for disaster control capable of responding quickly to all forms of disasters Indonesia could face.
- Establish an Early Warning System to monitor tsunamis. This is of greatest importance for the most endangered coastal area vulnerable to potential earthquake and the tsunami strikes.
- Education and training programs in disaster response knowledge must be immediately planned and carried out comprehensively so the communities are mentally and physically prepared to face disasters of this magnitude in the future.

Endnotes

¹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/indonesian/forum/story/2006/12/06/061225_acehtwoyears_pov.shtml

² Wisudo, Bambang. "Membangun Sistem yan Sigap Hadapi Bencana". Bencana Gempa dan Tsunami (Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster), Jakarta, Indonesia: June 2005, p.90.

